

ISLAM

Every age follows its own set of myths

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

In ancient times, the whole system of life was riddled with superstitious beliefs. Many strange, unfounded ideas were generally in vogue. Nicolson, in his *Astronomy* (1978) has recorded an interesting historical curiosity: "When an eclipse occurred, the Chinese thought that the Sun was swallowed by a huge dragon. The whole population joined in making as much noise as possible to scare it away. They always succeeded!"

It is now known that the eclipse of the sun or the moon can be predicted, its causes are known. It is also known that the period of time for the eclipse is fixed. There is no question of its beginning or ending at a different time because of human intervention. But, in their ignorance, the ancient people thought that the great noise they made caused it to disappear!

This kind of superstition has largely come to an end in modern times. However, other kinds of myths are still rampant and are accorded a similar degree of acceptance. The occurrence of events, which are caused by external circumstances, is attributed to human effort. For instance, the modern age has seen a revival of religions all over the world. This phenomenon has definite universal causes and score of books on the subject have been published. A noteworthy article on this topic appeared in the American magazine *Span* (December 1984), entitled, 'A Return to Religion.' But there are people in this world who believe that this revival is attributable solely to their own religious leaders, and proclaim this fact to the skies. These leaders are then regarded as the heroes, if not the creators, of the modern age.

Such mythical beliefs are the bedrock of modern 'religion'. When one set of myths disappears, man's fertile mind invents another. Thus myths and myth-making will survive as long as man himself.